off our backs

a women's newsjournal

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Janice Raymond, Author of *A Passion for Friendship* Talks about feminism, friendship and more

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Inside:

Postmodernism: How it Harms Women

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Inside:

Postmodernism: How it Harms Women

january 1999

off our backs
since 1970

volume xxix, number 1

Janice Raymond: Befriending Women

Janice Raymond is the author of several feminist books: *The Transexual Empire, A Passion for Friends,* and *Women as Wombs* . She now is executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, as well as teaching medical ethics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. carol anne douglas interviewed her by telephone in October.

oob: Describe your work for the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), the group's purposes and membership.

Raymond: I am executive director of CATW. Basically what the coalition is is feminist nongovernmental organizations working together on an international level against the sexual exploitation of women. The coalition serves as an umbrella that both coordinates and gets its direction from regional members. It has members from every region of the globe.

In any way possible, we bring international attention to the sexual exploitation of women, principally through prostitution. We work on a policy level to change policy. There's a big debate going on right now internationally on prostitution and a North American debate on pornography.

Our position is that prostitution is not a human right, it is a violation of human rights for anyone who is in it, whether or not that person is aware of the whole framework of why it is chosen, because there are no alternatives. We work on education, we work with international and national groups.

oob: Including former prostitutes' groups.

Raymond: Yes, we are a coalition. Part of our membership is women who are survivors of prostitution, who also take the position that prostitution is a violation of human rights.

A group like Coyote, which is the alleged mouthpiece for women in prostitution, takes the opposite point of view. But when we checked out Coyote's membership, there are very few women in it who have actually been in prostitution. The leadership were never in prostitution. They say they were, but they weren't.

We work with a lot of direct action groups that provide shelter for women in prostitution, including groups in San Francisco and the Philippines, that were founded by survivors of prostitution. They have a very different point of view than Coyote.

Coyote is supported by pimps. Not surprisingly; they have gotten public visibility.

It's not just rich men who are buying women; it's poor men as well.

We have testified before United Nations committees, before congressional committees, before governmental committees. We have a clearinghouse of information. We spearheaded the creation of a United Nations convention on sexual exploitation. We fund-raise for women's groups that are combatting trafficking. We organize networks, we document violations of women's human rights. We send out alerts when we hear of violations.

oob: Where is most sex tourism occurring now?

Raymond: Sex tourism stems from the time that the U.S. military was in Vietnam and took their R&R (rest and recreation) leaves in countries like Thailand and the Philippines. I was just there. It's very complex, because wherever you have military presence you have prostitution. What has happened in the Philippines and in Thailand has been worsened by the Asian economic crisis, where there are women who have very few other alternatives. So, countries like Thailand and the Philippines that can't provide employment for their people promote foreign currency coming into the country. They know this is one way that they can keep their economies solvent. It's complex. You have these ideas that these women are exotic. It's poverty, it's racism, it's military presence.

There's also a burgeoning sex tourism industry in Latin America. There's a sex tourism industry in Brazil that's growing bigger as the financial crisis becomes bigger.

But ultimately, you can't just look at economics and say "that's the reason." Men, wherever they are, can buy women in prostitution. It's not just rich men who are buying women; it's poor men who are buying women as well. There's a mandate that men have to have sex any way possible, even if they have to buy it. That's been rationalized by many factors, such as biology, with a whole overlay of sexual liberalism.

Now it's not so evident that there's a feminist "we."

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oob: Are you writing anything at the moment.

Raymond: No. Kathleen Barry, who with Dorchen Leidholdt founded the coalition, resigned in 1994, and I took over the leadership with Dorchen.. Since then, I have just written papers and brief articles for the coalition. Ultimately, I would like to write on book on the whole debate on prostitution.

A recent report written for the International Labor Organization said that prostitution is work and governments should recognize it. In the Asian region, the sex industry is a major part of the economy.

But why not push governments to employ women in jobs? Governments have been called on in the documents from the U.N. conferences in Beijing and Nairobi to employ women.

If prostitution is recognized as work, governments can say "we're employing women, 10 percent of our women are employed in the sex industry."

oob: You're unusual in combining work on violence against women with the kind of celebration of women's friendship that was in your book *A Passion for Friends.* How do you manage to hold onto both perspectives?

Raymond: I've always worked on violence against women. Earlier, it was mostly on reproductive technologies. How can you talk about violence against women without talking about how it erases women to each other. This is not sentimental; it's political. We need to redefine women's existence, not simply take women out of violent situations. I couldn't do this work if I wasn't grounded in friendships.

oob: In that book, you wrote about the idea of the idea of having a feminist *polis* or community. Do you think that we have that now?

Raymond: No, I don't. We at least have a community of protest. That is a kind of polis.

oob: What are the worst things that have happened in the movement?

Raymond (laughs)

oob: Well, how has the movement changed?

Raymond: I think it's changed in the sense of a collective struggle. The sense that there was a "we," although "we" didn't necessarily always agree. The "we" was arguing and debating.

I think now it's not so evident that there is a "we." There's not a kind of collective or group "we."

The positive aspect of that is that a lot of women are thinking much more for themselves about issues that affect them and other women. The other part is that you don't know who's out there. Much more convincing and much more persuasion is necessary. The worst is that feminism has become much more individual.

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off our backs
a women's newsjournal

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who we are
off our backs is a newsjournal by, for and about women. It has been published continuously since 1970 and is run by collective where all decisions are made by consensus. We have one paid member who works part-time as office manager; the rest of us have other full time jobs. We are always looking for feminist writers. You are welcome to send news, analysis, commentary, interviews, reviews or artwork on timely issues relevant to women. Please send for submission guidelines or find them on our web site.

submission guidelines
Timely news clippings and artwork relevant to women are welcome at any time. You should write or call for submission guidelines for other articles. We prefer manuscripts on disk if at all possible, and can print from Microsoft Word or WordPerfect versions 7.0 and lower, ASCII and some Mac files (please call). All articles should be received at least 7 days prior to layout, no exceptions.

come to layout
What we do is important to us and we value your comments and contributions. *oob*'s next layout is Saturday, January 16.

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❖ Quote Your Sister ❖

Feminism, like Boston, is a state of mind. It is the state of mind of women who realize that their whole position in the social order is antiquated, as a woman cooking over an open fire with heavy iron pots would know that her entire housekeeping was out of date.

—Rheta Childe Dorr (1866-1948)

❖❖❖

Like a lot of Black women, I have always had to invent the power my freedom requires.

—June Jordan (b. 1936)

❖❖❖

I constantly felt (as I suppose many an ambitious girl has felt) a thumping from within unanswered by any beckoning from without.

—Anna Julia Cooper (1859-1964)

Russia: ancient amazons unearthed

Evidence of women warriors was excavated among 2,400 year-old burial mounds in the Ukraine. Archaeologists found bodies of young women buried with their weapons in 5 out of 21 graves. It is hypothesized that Amazon women moved from their home south of the Black Sea and settled in the Ukraine.

One of the archaeologists studying the site, Dr. Gulyayev, believes that the women served as lightly armed troops guarding their properties while the men were out herding. Tales of Amazon women have appeared in stories by the Greek historian Herodotus, but his tales have been dismissed as fictional.

--info from www.aviva.org 12/20/98

Jordan: women march against violence against women

More than 250 women marched in a demonstration against domestic violence in Amman on November 26. Princess Basma joined in the rally which was held in response to the arrest of a father who killed his daughter after she eloped with her boyfriend.

The protest comes on the heels of an international conference held that week in Amman calling for judges to impose heavier penalties for "crimes of honor." About 25 women each year are killed by male family members for having premarital sex. Jail sentences typically imposed for such crimes range from 3 months to 2 years.

--info from *Speaking Up: The Violence Prevention Fund's News and Tips for the Domestic Violence Community*, 12/10/98

USA: joint custody for lesbians

For the first time in the United States, a judge in Newark, New Jersey, has ruled that a lesbian mother must share custody of her 2-year-old son with her ex-partner. The ex-partner is the nonbiological parent. She stayed at home to take care of the boy while her partner worked. The couple chose a sperm donor together and sent out birth announcements in both their names.

The final details of the custody agreement are not formalized yet, but it is likely that the ex-partner will care for the boy several days a week while the mother is working and will have him on alternate weekends. Although there have been custody battles between lesbians before, this is the first time that a nonbiological mother has been accorded a legal right to a child.

--info from www.aviva.org 12/20/98

Zimbabwe: men against rape

A group called Padare/Enkunleni, or the Men's Forum on Gender, has formed for the first time in Zimbabwe. The group was formed by six men with the goal of confronting gender stereotypes and violence.

Organizer Johan Gokoya says, "Unless we as men change our attitudes toward women, we are likely to rape because all men are potential rapists." The group has over 500 male supporters in the country, although many men decry the group, claiming that the members have been given a potion to control their manhood and that the group is "compromising" men.

--info from www.aviva.org 12/20/98

Namibia: international study on domestic violence

A major international survey on domestic violence funded by the World Health Organization will try to get an estimate on the prevalence of domestic violence worldwide. The survey will focus on seven countries. Competition to be a part of the study has been fierce.

Namibia was chosen as one of two African countries to be included in the study. The study will also include two Latin American, one European, and two Asian countries.

--info from www.aviva.org 12/20/98

Hong Kong: women organize on homebased work

HONG KONG--The Committee for Asian Women is conducting a campaign to press governments to sign the International Labor Organization's conventions on homework and part-time work, which were drafted in 1996 and 1994, respectively.

The conventions would ensure that these workers have the same rights as other workers to organize, to be protected against discrimination, to have occupational safety and health protections, to have equivalent remuration, social security protection, access to training, and have minimum working age and maternity protection.

Most homebased workers are women, and most earn less than the minimum wage in their countries. For example, a study in South Africa found that 65 percent of the women doing homebased work earned less than the minimum wage. In Australia, a study found that "outworkers" earn about a third of the standard wage for textile workers.

For more information or to help, contact: Committee for Asian Women, Unit E, 4/F, Skyline Tower, 18 Tong Mi Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

--info from *Asian Women Workers Newsletter*, July 1998

Britain: foreign domestic workers gain rights

LONDON--For the first time in 18 years, foreign domestic workers in Britain will be able to charge employers if they suffer abuse. Last July, the British Home Office recognized new rights for foreign domestics. These rights were formulated through consultations with Kalayaan, a London-based group started by Filipinas to lobby for the rights of Filipina and other domestic workers.

The new employment policy puts an end to the oppressive 1980 act that bound domestic workers to the employer they were hired by when they came to Britain. Since its implementation, Kalayaan has documented over 2,000 cases of domestic workers who have fled from their employers' homes alleging confinement, beatings, sexual assault, rape, and withheld wages. The new law regularizes the stay in Britain of domestics who previously found themselves in legal limbo.

However, Immigration Minister Michael O'Brien said that the changes will reduce the number of domestic workers admitted to the United Kingdom.

--info from Kinesis, 10/98

USA: lesbian teacher wins bias suit

A Utah high school volleyball coach who claimed she was fired because she is a lesbian won a lawsuit in a ruling delivered by a federal judge on November 25. The teacher, Wendy Weaver, said that Spanish Fork High School prohibited her from talking with students or staff about her sexual orientation, even outside of school.

U.S. District Judge Bruce Jenkins ruled that her rights of free speech, equal protection, and due process had been violated. He also order the Nebo School District to offer Weaver her job back, to lift the gag order, and to pay her $1,500 in damages. Jenkins wrote, "Although the Constitution cannot control prejudices, neither this court nor any other court should, directly or indirectly, legitimize them....Simple as it may sound, as a matter of fairness and evenhandedness, homosexuals should not be sanctioned or restricted for speech that heterosexuals are not likewise sanctioned or restricted for."

info from *The Arizona Republic*, 11/27/98

Rwanda: genocidal rape conviction

RWANDA--One September 2, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda made history by giving the first conviction for genocide in an international court and the first conviction for sexual violence in a civil war. It also is the first time that an international court has held that rape can be an act of genocide to destroy a group.

The tribunal found former mayor Jean-Paul Akayesu guilty of nine counts of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

"Rape is a serious war crime like any other," said Regan Ralph, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Women's Rights Division.

The Rwanda Tribunal was at first reluctant to indict Akayesu for rape. When Akayesu was first charged in 1996, the counts in his indictment did not include sexual violence, despite the fact that Human Rights Watch and other rights groups had documented widespread rape during the genocide, particularly in his area. A lack of political will among some high-ranking officials accounted for this.

During the Rwandan genocide, thousands of women were targeted by Hutu militia and soldiers of the former Armed Forces of Rwanda in their genocidal campaign. Tutsi women were raped, gang-raped, raped with objects such as sharp sticks and gun barrels, held in sexual slavery or sexually mutilated. These crimes were frequently part of a pattern in which Tutsi women were subjected to sexual violence after they had witnessed the torture and killing of relatives and the destruction of their homes.

Under pressure from Rwandan and international rights groups, the Office of the Prosecutor finally amended the charges against Akayesu to include sexual violence. During his trial, Rwandan women testified that they had been subjected to repeated collective rape by militia in and around his office and in his view. They spoke of witnessing other women being gang-raped and murdered while Akayesu stood by. Reportedly, he said to the rapists at one point, "don't complain to me now that you don't know what a Tutsi woman tastes like."

International criminal law has long encompassed crimes of sexual violence: rape can be a violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention, the 1948 Genocide Convention, the 1984 Torture Convention, and a crime against humanity under the Nuremburg Charter. After World War II, the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg established rape as a crime against humanity, but did not actually prosecute it. The Military Tribunal for the Far East (the Tokyo Tribunal) did convict Japanese officers of rape.

Despite these legal precedents, rape has long been mischaracterized and dismissed by political leaders as a private crime, the ignoble act of the occasional solider. Worst still, it has been accepted precisely because it is so commonplace.

More recently, both the two International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda have brought sexual violence charges. In July, a treaty creating a permanent International Criminal Court expressly named crimes based on sexual violence as part of the court's jurisdiction.

Human Rights Watch is urging the Rwanda Tribunal to indict more suspects for crimes of sexual violence.

--info from Human Rights Watch

Bosnia: war rape conviction

THE HAGUE--A United Nations Court sentenced a Bosnian Croat paramilitary commander to 10 years in prison, the first judgment to deal exclusively with rape as a war crime.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia found Anto Furundzija guilty of standing by while another paramilitary beat and raped a woman detainee during an interrogation in 1993. Furundzija headed a unit call the "The Jokers," which operated near the central Bosnian city of Vitez during the 1992-95 Bosnian War.

--info from *Washington Post*, 12/11

news compiled by cad

India: men shut down lesbian film

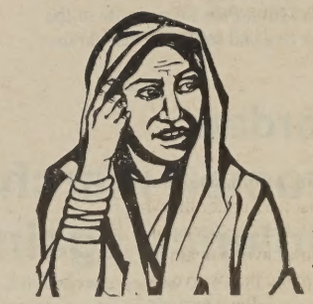
BOMBAY--In India's film city of Bombay (Bollywood), stars have rallied in support of the lesbian film Fire, and have sought the intervention of India's Supreme Court to allow the film's screening.

At the beginning of December, members of the right-wind, ultranationalist Hindu party Shiv Sena, which also is the governing party of the Western state of Maharashtra, forcibly stopped the screening of Fire in Bombay and Delhi and damaged theaters where the film was being shown.

The Shiv Sena says that the film is immoral and a bad influence on youth.

The Maharashtra chief minister reportedly congratulated the members of his party for storming into a theater showing Fire.

Ten Indian film stars have filed a petition to the Indian Supreme Court, noting that Fire has received 14 international awards and was showing to packed houses in Bombay in the three weeks after its release. The film-makers are complaining about the violations of freedom of speech. The Indian film censor board had cleared the film for showing.



graphic from Manushi

Distributors of the film have withdrawn Fire not only from Bombay theaters but also from other cities.

The police have arrested the president of the Bombay unit of Shiv Sena in connection with the attack on the theaters.

Deep Mehta, the film's producer-director, is a leading Indian film-maker.

--info from the BBC

China: women split over divorce change

BEIJING--Women's advocates in China are bitterly split over proposals to make divorce more difficult and to punish adulterers.

Some women officials believe that the move to curb divorce would give women needed protection, while others say that the state should not get involved in paternalistic policies.

The proposed law change was drafted by older women. Xu Weihua of the All-China Women's Federation said, "Divorce is too easy under the existing marriage law, and women's rights have not been protected, so many have become single mothers and poor." Other drafters say that divorce has become too easy.

China has had an increase in divorce in recent years, but the rate still is 12 per 100 marriages, which is very low by western standards.

China's 1980 marriage law in principle allows fairly easy divorce, with grounds such as alienation of affection. However, obtaining a divorce is difficult in practice, particularly because of housing shortages.

The National People's Congress appointed a panel of legal experts to come up with a new proposed law. This August, a report on the draft paper was published in a Beijing newspaper, and there has been much debate since.

One magazine published an open letter from women whose husbands had affairs who wanted adultery to become unlawful.

The proposed new divorce law would allow divorce on grounds such as adultery, battering, and alcoholism. It also would allow a spouse to call on the police if they suspect their partner is committing adultery.

Chen Xinxin, of the China Marriage and Family Research Institute says that the criminalization of adultery would create opportunities for extortion.

--info from *New York Times*, 11/18

Janice Raymond

continued from page 1

The worst was the so-called "Sex Wars." That was located within the North American region. The worst that came out of that was that we didn't get any real action..

Then queer theory diluted feminist theory to a lifestyle.

We need an internationalist perspective. Some of the most valuable feminists are in coalitions in Asia. They're on the front lines of a lot of this. A lot of Filipina feminists were political prisoners under the Marcos regime and they became very politicized. They don't have to deal with a lot of the liberal garbage that we've had to deal with.

I don't mean to romanticize the developing countries, but because they are from a whole different political context, a lot of what is very hopeful is coming out of these countries.

oob: My impression of feminists from Third World countries such as India is that they have a more integrated perspective of violence and economics.

Raymond: They don't have the debate that we had about which is the most influential form of oppression -- is it economics, is it patriarchy -- they tie those together and have a very radical feminist analysis of the place of men in all of this. But they don't minimize the place of the economy. They bring a lot of these things together because they live them; it's not simply an intellectual debate. A lot of them are real activists.

They are in a position where living for your ideals carries the hazard of possibly dying for them, whereas we rarely find ourselves in the position that living for our ideals carries the possibility that we might have to die for them. Their revolutionary practice is very different.

I try to reconcile my own life to that. I write, I teach in the university, and I'm also an activist. I guess that managing those worlds, especially the worlds of being a scholar and an activist, isn't always easy. Less easy since the so-called Sex Wars that have put anti-prostitution scholars on the margin of the academic world.

Prostitution is not a form of sexual power for women. It's not sexual liberty. It's not a discourse. It's a fact of life, of women's lives, that has to be dealt with. The realities of that life have gotten lost in the intellectual debate. Academic women speak about women in prostitution as choosing to have sex with men, with bottles, with raxor blades, in a way that conveys a quality of choice. They talk about choice as if there's no context.

Some people who have very liberal reputations are promoting the legalization of prostitution around the world. They're funding women's groups and human rights organizations that take their position . Most of the European cartels, criminal organizations that traffic in women, were operating illegally; now, they can operate legally out of the Netherlands.

This is a powerful industry. It's the most advertised industry on the Internet. They will go to great lengths to oppose people who are fighting them.

> When countries in some ways legalize prostitution, there's an enormous influx in trafficking.

It's very much organized by governments, by Holland, by Germany. It's fair to say that what we're witnessing now on the international level what we witnessed in the pornography debate in the U.S. We're seeing the same kinds of power-brokers, seeing the sex industry funding women's groups, nongovernmental organizations on the international level and human rights groups who are saying they promote the redefinition of prostitution as sex work or who take no position on it. Those are the groups that are getting the funding. We have been told that if we'd change our position on prostitution we'd get funding.

oob: Is the Netherlands now becoming a center for trafficking?

Raymond: Yes, that's the mecca of sex trafficking and prostitution. Within the last 50 to 20 years, the Netherlands has legalized prostitution; it's also legalized brothels. Wherever you have countries that have in some way legalized or regulated prostitution, you see an enormous influx in trafficking. Why?

The argument is that if you regulate prostitution it will become less and it will be subject to government control. The reality is that when you regulate it legally or legalize it outright, it gets more accepted. Men get more demanding . Prostitutes want the man to wear a condom. He doesn't want to do that. He wants to be in control of the sex, and he wants more exotic women. He doesn't want the local women who are licensed by the state. So what you have in Holland is that 60 to 80 percent of the women in prostitution are foreign women. They're not licensed. Men want cheaper sex, they want "more perverse" sex. They don't get it at legalized brothels.

oob: Are women being brought to the United States through sex trafficking?

Raymond: There is some of that in the States. Not as much, which has to do with our strict laws. There is not a permissive legal climate for prostitution. However, we have prostitutes from Russian, from the Ukraine, some prostitutes from Asia and from Latin America. There's been a lot of publicity about Russian women being brought in. Before this influx of Russian and Ukrainian women, there were Asian and Latin American women being brought in, not on the same scale perhaps, but large enough. All of a sudden there's a lot of publicity about the Russians, but very little has been done about the trafficking of women from Asia and Latin America.

We're trying to track what's happening to women coming into the country, what the sex industry is doing, not simply looking at the women, which is what everybody does.

> Sisterhood is powerful never meant that women were friends.

oob: These women are being trafficked into brothels?

Raymond: Yes, brothels, and private homes. Often immigrants bring women from their country to this country, and once they get here, they're entrapped.

There's also the serial sponsorship in mail-order marriages. A man will go to a country, hook up with a woman through an agency, marry her, bring her back to this country, discard her or turn her into prostitution, then go back to the country, marry another one, and bring her to the States. Some men marry five or six women. Nobody tracks this. They're never caught. Nobody notices that within five or six years they've brought in that many women who they claim are their wives. No one ever checks up on what happens to the women.

oob: Do you still consider yourself an outside\insider (a term from her book *A Passion for Friends*, meaning being an outsider with outside values but trying to work in the system)?

Raymond: I do. You're the only one who's asked me that question in about five years. The kind of activism that I now find myself involved in involves talking to a lot of forums, working with international commissions, going all over the world, so I had to think about how I could translate the ideas so that they weren't hedged by the rhetoric of what we all assumed we all knew. This is not to simplify the radical nature of feminism, but to make intelligible the radical nature of feminism. I want us to be able to say what we really think in those public forums.

We have to say that women don't control their sexuality, don't control their reproduction. Reproduction is about sexuality. Teenage pregnancy is about sex. Let's teach those kids about incest and sexual abuse.

oob: What should feminists being doing now?

Raymond: We have to understand that the "sex sales" talk we hear from sexual liberals both in academe and in the women's movement does not represent the views of women working with prostitutes. We need to hear from groups like Sage in San Francisco and Breaking Free in Minneapolis, which don't get mentioned in the press.

We have a lot of academics who write about an "outlaw sexuality," who are independent activists of their own sexuality. Women's Studies and academics have glamorized prostitution with this whole analysis of "sex work" and "sexual outlaws." It is amazing to me that these academic critics of capitalism write about the sex industry and think that what we're dealing with here is sex, not sexual exploitation, and that we somehow have to preserve sex in any way possible, even if its exploitation.

Every time a feminist critic criticizes some facet of sexual exploitation, they say she's against sex. We almost have to swear a loyalty oath to sex.

oob : What part does friendship play in your work now? What does it mean to be a friend to other women?

Raymond: From my own vantage point of experience in working in different feminist activities, it is important to work with women who are your friends. As the personal is political, so the political is personal. The work I do with women in the international feminist movement is with friends. It is important to work with women who are your friends, not simply working together on feminist goals. That work is deepened when you also share personal bonds and commitments and share a friendship that's personal and political.

We need to pay attention when women are taxed to the limit of their possibilities. There's been a lack of attention to that in feminism. Sisterhood is powerful never meant that women

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Post-modernism Harms Women

On October 16, Portland's Lesbian Community Project deleted the words "woman" and "women" from its bylaws, extended voting rights to men and eliminated the bylaw which unequivocally expressed the organization's commitment "to the individual and collective well-being of Lesbians".

That same month, a magazine entitled *Transgender Tapestry* explained the San Diego murder of a female therapist by a male patient: the man - who "identified" as a transsexual woman despite living as a man - - was "oppressed" because the therapist refused to recommend him for sex-reassignment surgery.

In both of these instances the actual oppression of real women is minimized by means of an almost psychotic break with reality in which the physical nature of sex is overwhelmed by the theoretical "deconstruction" of gender.

The "postmodern" supposition that sex is nothing more than a "constructed social identity" threatens the very concept of "woman" while leaving intact the oppression of women. Little wonder that the sophistry of "deconstruction" - primarily developed and promulgated by white men such as Michael Foucault - has found such favor in our sexist society. But when even off *our backs* publishes a two-page paean to "deconstruction" which cites Colin Powell and Jerry Springer as its only "authorities" ("Identity Politics and Progress", *off our backs*, April 1998) it is time for a reality check in a world in which women are routinely discriminated against and murdered *because they are women.* "Deconstruction" may very well eliminate the perception of such injustice by mutilating the bodies beyond all recognition but the injustice itself will continue unabated.

Portland's Lesbian Community Project eliminates women from bylaws

Best known in Portland for its annual New Year's Eve party and summer softball tournament, the Lesbian Community Project previously promoted issues such as lesbian health, organized political opposition to anti-homosexual ballot initiatives, and enriched the social and personal lives of thousands of Oregon lesbians over the 11 years of its existence. However, at its annual meeting on October 16, LCP not only extended full voting membership to men but turned a cold shoulder to members who are - to use a term from the 1970s -- "woman-identified" women, removing all references to women in the organization's bylaws.

One of the people for whom this policy change was obviously made is LCP's only paid staff member, who was hired only this past spring as Debi Law but is now going by the name of "Deke" and using male pronouns to refer to "him"-self.

During LCFs emotionally-charged annual meeting, many women expressed a deep sense of betrayal that their desire to maintain LCP as a women's organization was discounted in deference to "male" sensibilities. One woman denouncing the change in LCFs bylaws decried what she saw as lesbians "being invisibilized by our own organizations." Nevertheless, the changes to the bylaws were approved by a vote of 66 to 21.

Lesbians of color suffered a double loss: LCP's predominantly white membership voted by a margin of 73-10 to revoke the organization's commitment to affirmative action. The LCP bylaw which previously required that 3 of the organization's 12 board positions "shall be designated for Women of Color" was eliminated and replaced with the following: "The Board will strive to reflect the broad spectrum of diversities in our lesbian communities, including but not limited to ethnicity, sexual identity, culture, age, economic class, gender identity, physical ability. All Board members will be committed to LCFs anti-racist work. Reflecting this commitment, the Board will strive to be at least 50% community members of color."

As to how well LCP complied with its new "commitment" - LCFs bylaws were also changed to reduce the number of board members from 12 to 6 -- and of the six people elected at the October 16 meeting, five were white and only one was a person of color.

Transgender Magazine Blames Woman for Her Own Murder

The front cover of *Transgender Tapestry* claims the magazine is dedicated to "Celebrating the Diversity of Gender Expression" - but the Fall 1998 issue of the magazine was nothing to celebrate. Inside, a full-page article explained that a female therapist named Rita Powers was murdered because she balked at issuing a letter recommending sex-reassignment surgery for her murderer, Walter Miller. The article consistently referred to Miller with female pronouns despite the fact that he held a job as a man.

"She was receiving some negativity from her therapist", the article explained, "suicide being the only other course of action that she saw, she violently took the life of the one person that was standing in the way".

Nowhere in the article was there any sense of outrage at the crime or expression of sympathy for the victim of this indefensible act of male violence. Instead there was the attitude typically expressed by rapists and their defenders that the woman somehow brought it on herself because of her own actions. Not content with portraying the murderer as a victim, however, the author of the article attempted to further mitigate the severity of the crime by blaming society as a whole because of the discrimination perpetrated against transgenders in general.

The absurdity of this exculpation for murder is evident based upon facts contained in the article itself -- for example, the fact that the murderer still lived and worked as a man and the fact that his legal name was still Walter Miller. Nevertheless, in homage to the "social construct" of gender embraced by *Transgender Tapestry* and its writers, the magazine consistently employed female pronouns and repeatedly referred to Miller with his alias of Julia Morgan.

The same magazine contained another column -- entitled "Ethics and Transgender Care" -- which exploited the murder of Rita Powers to open a critique of therapists and therapy in general.

Neither column bothered to provide any information about Powers. Did she have a family - a lesbian partner, a husband, a child or a pet? Is she mourned by loved-ones or did she lead a lonely existence? Readers won't find the answers to those sorts of questions in the pages of *Tapestry* because the magazine is too busy celebrating "the diversity of gender expression" - and lamenting the subsequent suicide of Walter Miller - to waste any space on Miller's victim.

The "Social De-construction" of Women

Transgender Tapestry's "social construction" of Walter Miller as a woman obfuscated the otherwise obvious infliction of male violence against a female by breaking down the very real physical distinctions between the perpetrator and his victim. Similarly, the Lesbian Community Project's solicitous concern for male participation and male sensibilities led to the organization's elimination of its previous distinction between men and women at the sole expense of women. Both examples comply with the notion that gender is a "social construct" - and in both cases the result is a myopic failure to recognize the harm done to women. But that is the logical conclusion to the "post-modern de-construction" of gender: the end of gender as a social construct" has as its goal the elimination of sexual differentiation - and in a male-dominated society, the minimalization, intimidation and elimination of women is the inevitable means to that end.

The fact that in both instances women are the losers illustrates the ease with which "post-modern deconstruction" facilitates the reinforcement of the

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Still Passionate About Friends

Interviewing Janice Raymond reminded me of her wonderful book *A Passion for Friends*, which inspires me still as much as it did when it was published in the early '80s. It has also inspired many Women's Studies students I have taught, and I strongly recommend reading it if you never have.

Raymond pointed out the importance of women being friends to each other, despite all the obstacles that patriarchy puts in our way that make us seem not lovable to each other. Women's friendships have been devalued; we are not supposed to center our lives on them. Women's friendships also can be profoundly political, Raymond wrote. In order to live as feminists, we need friends and community that support our values and help us to develop and maintain them.

Friendships develop in many ways. I just spent Thanksgiving with an ex-lover, her lover, and their daughter, who are my good friends, and I plan to spend Christmas Eve with another ex-lover and her lover. Most of my closest friends are women I was once in love with. The process of transforming from being in love to being a friend was generally not entirely smooth, sometimes far from it, but always very worth the effort because the women I have fallen in love with were women I liked profoundly and had much in common with. In some cases, I was not able to be entirely comfortable with ex-lover until I was established in a good lover relationship with someone else. So the process has taken years, but any friendship takes years to develop.

We need to be patient with friends, to be attentive to where they are at a particular time, not to try to force our own wishes on them. Not that this is easy -- it has taken me fifty-two years of living to gain some skill at this. Each friendship has its own rhythms, and those rhythms change somewhat over the years. Some friends move away but stay close, while others stay in town but change the patterns of their lives, such as by having children.

Change isn't easy for me -- as one of my friends once noted, I want to spend my life always doing the same things with the same people (once I found the feminist movement, joined off our backs, and came out as a lesbian, I knew just what I wanted). Nevertheless, friendship habits can change in ways that work if both people care enough and have enough patience. One close friend moved out of town a decade ago, but we communicate every few weeks on the telephone, see each other about once a year, and are as close as ever.

Long-distance friendships are common for many feminists, particularly academics who have to move in order to get jobs in their field. Loneliness is a fact of life for many who have their closest friends and political cronies in distant places. Mary Daly calls this "diaspora" in her new book, *Quintessence*.

Close friendships are vital for sharing our feelings and helping us understand them. Lesbian feminists often realize this because our families of origin and friends from our past have failed to understand us and our movement. Our friends and our lovers (who are our friends) are the center of our lives. Yet we do not always make friendship central or treat friends as carefully as we treat our biological families. We do not always see our friendships as long-term institutions that will go through phases and have troubles. Sometimes we will be annoyed, sometimes we will be hurt. But if we respect each other and have a little patience, the friendship may well emerge stronger than ever.

> In order to live as feminists, we need friends and community that support our values.

If we are honest, we will need to admit, at least to ourselves, that we sometimes hurt our friends or try their patience; it isn't always the friend who hurts or aggravates us. I still find myself not always treating friends as well as I know I should.

But not all friends are close friends. There are colleagues in the movement -- what we used to call "sisters" and I still would like to -- both near and far. And there is an attitude of friendship that we can have to women we don't know.

As Raymond notes in her interview, we have not always been friends to other feminists. Not all feminists will like each other, but that is a different matter. We many times have failed to respect each other, have expected each other to work endlessly with little recognition, have been suspicious of each other's motives, have trashed each other, have patronized each other, have misrepresented each other's ideas. Who would feel comfortable saying, "The feminist movement is friendly"? Sometimes some feminist groups are friendly, but even that isn't easy. It's hard to be welcoming while working feverishly to survive.

But how could we exist as feminists without the friendship of women we don't know? The writings, organizations, networks, and art of other women keep us going, help us understand our lives, and help us do our own feminist work. Just knowing that other feminists are "out there" helps immeasurably.

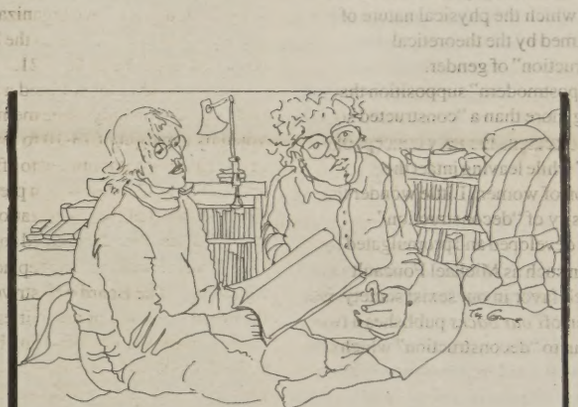
> How could we exist as feminists without the friendship of women we don't know?

Being a friend to women is very demanding. A friend to women must be concerned about all women, not just those who are most like herself. A friend to women must be concerned about all violence against women and all economic oppression, not just live in her own world without trying in some way (perhaps never enough) to work against violence and poverty. A friend to women must want all voices to be heard, not just her own.

Just as we fail at our close friendships at times, we also often fail to be friends to other women. But if we see that we need to be such a friend, we can try.

My friends are the joy of my life, and I am thankful for all of them. The feminist movement is my life, and I hope I give some friendship to the women who have befriended me through it.

by carol anne douglas



graphic by lee corinne

Raymond

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were friends. It meant solidarity, but it didn't necessarily mean friendship.

The work we do, especially work against violence against women, is such high burnout work. Women are supposed to take care of others and are supposed to take care of themselves. We expect them to have inexhaustible reserves of energy. That's a feminist mode of femininity. I would hope that women working together would pay attention to that. A lot of feminists who burned out felt undervalued and unappreciated.. Paying attention to friendship might help to alleviate some of these problems.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Lammas bookstore in Washington, DC celebrated 25 years of business in 1998. Ruby Sales, an activist and scholar, organized *Strong Women Keep Coming: Three Generations of Many Women Speaking and Acting for Our Lives*, in conjunction with the bookstore's anniversary. The weekend long event, which occurred in the fall, brought together feminists from the last three decades to discuss the past and future of feminism.

oob attended the banquet, which honored the original owner of Lammas, Mary Farmer. We took this opportunity to speak with a few women, and ask what they think of the gap that exists between feminist academia and feminist activism, and what can be done to bridge higher education and direct action in order strengthen the feminist movement.

The six women who appear in this article have been involved with women's issues for more than two decades. Chandra Mohanty, published scholar, and the director of Women's Studies at Hamilton College; Minnie Bruce Pratt, poet and writer; Sandra Robinson, Executive Director of the Georgia Coalition for Homelessness; Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, feminist scholar activist, and author; Leslie Feinberg, author, journalist, and activist; Leslie Cagan, national organizer.

WHERE TO BEGIN.

oob: How you feel we can bridge the gap between academia and activism?

Chandra Mohanty: I actually think that we need to start thinking about how to do activism within the academy. We also have to reconceputualize the notion of the academic, so that I'm a scholar and a teacher. So that is somebody who is an activist. For instance, what I do in the classroom is I see myself as an organizer. That actually does change somewhat the perspective from which I teach, and often what I'm hoping they learn or try to teach. That ideas and theories and concepts have real effect on the world and how you live your life. If they take home anything from women's studies/feminist classes, I'm hoping that what they take is that there is something important about not just coming into consciousness of your own self, but the only way you can think about change is through collective meets.

oob: What do you say to someone who doesn't think the classroom is a form of activism?

Chandra: I would say that most college students who are radical in any way are involved in campus activity. Now sometimes that's very limiting, and sometimes that's transformative in many deep ways for the campus itself. What I often find frustrating is that there is no history of activism within an academic setting. If we had these histories and taught them, people would see that there are alternative ways of existing as a student. The other thing is that people graduate. If you make it possible for them to conceive of their lives as being involved in social change, organizing, or activism, that for me is form of teaching someone something different than 'oh you have to go on and do this type of scholarship' which is removed from the lives of people in your community or communities else where. The other thing is I don't see myself as just an academic. The work I do is not only in the academy. I work with other grass roots organizations. In fact I have a half time position which is deliberate within the college. The other time is time spent with organizers and doing other forms of work with other groups of people, and I make that really explicit to students in the classroom modeling what is possible.

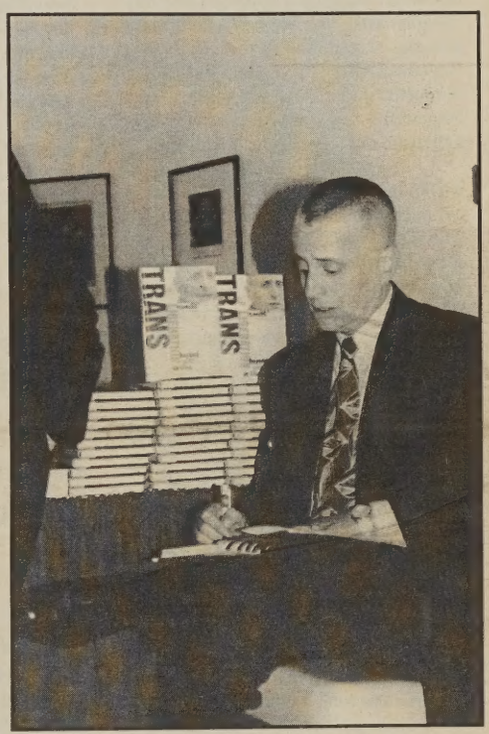
oob: How do you propose to mobilize younger and burnt out activists from the field?

Chandra: We are talking specifically in the academy, in a liberal arts college. I think that one of the ways to mobilize students is to start politicizing for students their role as students. That students start seeing that being a student in that roll is a profoundly political act. You have certain rights as students. You can be empowered in certain ways. You can demand certain kinds of knowledges. You can demand information about the institution in certain ways, and you can have a profound effect on changing the institution. If I'm able to use a little piece of that successfully then I think I have taught students that you can in fact be an actor in a very real way in changing your life. For instance, I teach material on education where people really have to look at the institution and they have to literally look at the history of the institution, they have to look at admissions policies, curriculum. So what they do is analyze all of things about the institution and they have to see that the way they are situated as students by different groups in power is profoundly political. Often times when you see that you don't feel powerless anymore. Part of the way power functions in the academy is by mystification, and by hiding all kinds of things from students. So if you can give people the tools to actually read the institution and the way power and authority works then it becomes transparent. That I think can be profoundly empowering. I'm not always successful. I'm depressed a lot.

Leslie Cagen: I think in terms of bridging the gap this is a hard one. You know how activism happens and where is happens. I'm an organizer, I'm not an academic. I'm not anti-intellectual work by any means. My work is in the community as an organizer. I think in the culture at large there is a anti-intellectualism. I think that sometimes filters down into activist circles as well. That we are the serious people because we're on the front lines. We have to overcome and cut through some of the attitudes that activists pick up.

oob: How do you break down those stereotypes?

Cagen: I think the best way to do that is when people actually interact, and that means people in the community and people in the academy need to step out and into somebody else's framework.. That's not easy in a culture that compartmentalizes everything, and it's all atomized and broken up. It's very hard to step out of those structures and the community that you feel is yours and get beyond that. Part of that is finding those points of intersection and talk and take some common action. Fortunately right now my paid job as an organizer is around the fight in NYC for CUNY (City University of New York) which is under attack by the right wing. My job is to work with labor unions, religious institutions, community groups, elected officials. In other words, not students, not faculty, but other hopes to build some of those bridges. It's very exciting because people do understand the role of public higher education especially CUNY and what a valuable contribution that institution has made to the life if the city. Literally millions of people have gone through CUNY.



LESLIE FEINBERG

Finding struggles like that is an easier one because it has an organic connection. I do think there are a lot of people in the academy, not only in women studies but in other fields also. Certainly in ethnic studies, Black studies, Latino studies doing incredibly important work. They can't just wait for the activists to come to them, they need to go out and build that bridge.

oob: Or hope that the students leave school and get involved in activism.

Cagen: I think their are things that teachers

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can do to encourage activism. I was a student activist in the 60s, and there are a lot of my peers who have ended up teaching and know about activism, who have a critique of the world we live in. Who know activism can make a difference, and I think some of them have gotten lazy. They don't encourage, they don't push, they don't say 'as part of your class work you need to go and volunteer at an organization three hours a week.'

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

You don't have to overload people, but to really encourage that and also to respond to when students are active and to give support, and not just tell students to go do this and go do that but to encourage it. Go to a student organization and ask what can we do to support you. What do you need from us? As simple as making announcement in class about your meetings and events. Again people need to step out what their used to and go up to people and ask what they can do to help to work together.

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz: I went to college in 62 and finished graduate school course work in 71 in NYC and Berkeley. In that time, Colleges and Universities were sites of change. There were sights of activism and campus struggle going on, and there were also places where people went out to do kinds of activist work. The emphasis on high theory and the kind of language that nobody understands, is really about people not knowing what to do, and in someway retreating. I was out of the university for a number of years and when I came back to the postmodern jargon it was really shocking how much the language was impenetrable and how you had to read a bunch of text to familiarize yourself with it. Yet this is where some of the most radical change occurs, which is contradictory, but I really do think that its a failure of nerve and also a sense of how to perceive. The more you have a sense of what to do in the activist world the more you have to talk so that people understand you.

Cagan: When both of us were in school in the 60s, there was that culture of activism, and there isn't that right now. There are pockets of activism, and there is a whole lot of people doing hard work but there is not that kind of culture and climate of activism. Whole governments changed because of what campus activism was all about. The role of student organizing, not just in this country, but all around the world have been important.

INSPIRING CHANGE

oob: What are your thoughts about mobilizing among young adults, and working to bridging the gap between academia and activism?

Leslie Feinberg: For me the most importan thing is that my writing is an extension of my political arguments. I know that there are people who want very much to have their voices be heard because it's a form of validation in a society where weaker sources are frequently rendered invisible. Personally the most important part of it is organizing beyond the boundaries of individualism, authorship, and developing grass root coalitions that embrace more and more peoples' grievances and oppressions. I would say that at time in communities when there are layoffs and people don't have health insurance and the economic crisis that's hitting around the world is like Hurricane George. Welfare has been abolished, immigrants on welfare, gay marriage. I see the same thing happening on campus: tuition is going up, financial aid is going down, affirmative action is being attacked, multicultural is under siege. All of these things are parallels as the University becomes a bigger and bigger corporations where they rent out food services to McDonalds, the library services and bookstore services to Barnes and Noble. We are seeing a similar response to corporate America. Waging a war against us, so our standard of living, and using accommodation of scape goating and economic attacks to keep us divided. My work is all about saying we have every reason to want to struggle together. Overcoming differences, understanding differences, standing up for each other and forming a coalition.

Minnie Bruce Pratt: One of the things that is true for me as a writer and activist is I'm very conscious that I am learning from the generation that is coming along behind me, and I feel very strongly that that needs to be acknowledged right now by people in my generation. What I'm seeing is 14-28 year olds providing leadership. For instance in the high schools around gay/straight alliances, and colleges there is some incredible organizing going under conditions that people in my generation have been afraid to tackle around sexuality. It's 14, 15, 16 year olds providing the leadership. It's not that we have nothing to offer, we have a lot to learn. Similarly the struggles around immigration rights on the west coast. A lot of the leadership around that struggle were high school age people of color who saw what those structures were going to do to their education. Also around the gradual capitalization corporation stance of the universities struggles in NYC at CUNY. It's a challenge for me as a writer and activist to stay in touch with that kind of organizing and concerns and see what I can learn from that as part of strengthening that bridge between generations. It doesn't just go one way at all.

GRASS ROOTS ACTIVISM

oob: Do you think we can bridge the gap between academics and activism?

Sandra Robinson: I do. I've been a part of efforts to bring that gap closer together. Its very challenging and hard. One of the things that I try to bring forward is a constituency that rarely gets addressed, and that's poor women. I provide some information based on their capacity to understand. Whether or not it's around feminism, or it's around economic issues or other kinds of issues of racism. I'm committed to developing women. Poor black women specifically, to become voices for themselves because the white feminist movement hasn't addressed their concerns, and in many regards the educated black feminists movement hasn't addressed women's basic fundamental concerns. Because most of it has come out of educational institutions, intelligence, organizations, and not really grass root movements.

The group that I'm with is the Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger. That name doesn't really characterize all that we do with women. We work with women on a long term basis in communities around concrete issues that are really close to their hearts, and we attempt to bring to the table new information, new understanding about the struggle that they encounter with new perspectives. We want to bring an international focus so it's not just what is happening to me and my next door neighbor, but what's happening to me, my next door neighbor, and my brother or sister who lives in South America, who is engaging or encountering from the same oppressive conditions that I experience. We focus not just on feminist issues, not to say that that wouldn't be a good thing, but to bring it in the context of all the struggles that people have around economics, race, around sexual orientation, around homophobia. We try to bring clarity to what our vision is for the world where everyone can be nurtured and who they are called to be.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

leslie feinberg's website
www.transgenderwarrior.org
minnie bruce pratt's website
www.mbpratt.org
leslie cagan (email: lcagan@peoplelink.com)
ad hoc comm.for an open process
P.O.Box 1114
Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011

interviews by renee klorman

"Creating Change" offers activists opportunities for organizing, infighting

About 1,800 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender activists from all over the United States came to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from November 11-15 to take part in the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 11th annual Creating Change conference. Creating Change, billed as a grassroots training center for political organizers, was attended by activists from across the political spectrum and included workshops and plenaries on a range of issues from sexual liberation and the politics of desire, to voter identification and faith based organizing.

"Whether you advocate, educate, demonstrate, or celebrate we understand that these are all forms of action," NGLTF Executive Director Kerry Lobel told the assembled participants the first night "You decide what action is right for you."

Although there were not as many people there as NGLTF's hopeful projection of between 2,000 and 3,000, Creating Change was, by any standard, extremely well attended. Speakers addressed workshops that were often standing room only, and the crowd quickly exceeded the capacity of the Westin William Penn hotel's elevators, lobby, and dining facilities.

The overflow, or in at least one case the mere presence, of the visibly queer crowd caused friction with some of the other hotel guests. On Saturday night representatives of a Pittsburgh accounting firm who had booked the Westin's grand ballroom for a company function tried to force an exhibitor positioned near the ballroom's entrance to cover his display of Gay and Lesbian newspapers with a sheet. The exhibitor challenged that his display had the hotel's permission to be there and refused. The only other external disruption occurred when two representatives from the anti-gay group Americans for the Truth about Homosexuality (AFTAH) were discovered attending workshops and ousted by NGLTF conference director Susan Hyde.

HRC employees candace gingrich and charlotte young.

Americans for Truth about Homosexuality later put out a press release charging that the conference featured "homosexual prostitutes" and "public sex advocates," as well as a film in which a woman was depicted "giving instructions on how to 'strap on' an artificial penis." In the release, AFTAH president Peter LaBarbera is quoted: "We must expose these homosexual events because the politically correct media refuses to do so."

In addition to those people physically in attendance over the five days of the conference, plenary sessions were simulcast in audio over the Internet for those activists unable to make the journey to Pittsburgh.

Besides workshops and caucus sessions, conference goers were invited to attend any of three queer friendly religious services held on site throughout the weekend; a Shabbat, a Catholic Mass, and an interdenominational service.

Filmmakers Shosana Rosenfeld and Joyce Warshow were also on hand to screen and discuss their respective works "Scent u Va Butch" a film about "butches, butchness, and butch as a state of being," and "Some Ground to Stand On," a documentary about the life of lesbian feminist peace activist Blue London. Authors including Sarah Schulman, Barbara Smith, and Kate Clinton held book signing sessions, and for those participants who felt they had been deprived of the opportunity to attend high school dances with a same-sex partner, Creating Change also hosted a "prom" from the fictitious "Rainbow High, Home of the Fighting Poodles".

From a field organizing perspective most of the strategic dialogue focused on the need to shift away from national and urban organizing to a more community based and rural focus, much like the successful strategy long pursued by the conservative right. To this end, NGLTF used the conference as a vehicle to promote the "Equality Begins at Home" project, a joint venture between NGLTF and the Federation of LGBT Statewide Political Organizations. "Equality Begins at Home" will consist of a week of queer positive events in all U.S. States and Territories and will be held in late March of 1999. According to event organizers, more than 40 states, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, have agreed to take part. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has pledged to award each state an organizing grant of $5,000 to help offset the costs of participation, although state groups are charged with deciding what types of events the money will go to. Activities that have already been planned include a billboard campaign in Louisiana, a youth conference in Florida, and a series of regional "town meetings" in Pennsylvania culminating in a rally on the State Capital.

"For many years people thought gays only lived on the coasts, and our movement promoted that mythology" Kerry Loebel told reporters at a Friday press conference "And for many years people fled their homes for those communities in search of a better life. But people aren't fleeing anymore."

Nadine Smith who is working on "Equality Begins at Home" projects in Florida agreed.

"For those of us who do live back in those smaller towns, this has been incredible." She said. "The work we are doing now will go down in history as the day we changed our movement."

Strategically, a new focus on reaching out to other factions of the progressive movement was also apparent. Patricia Ireland, President of the National Organization for Women, and Linda Chavez-Thompson, Executive Vice President of the AFL-CIO, were both featured plenary speakers. Linda Chavez-Thompson highlighted the similarities between the goals of the labor movement and those of the LGBT civil rights movement, and articulated the AFL-CIO's efforts to better represent and support queer union members.

"The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the movement you represent, has so much in common with the union movement. Our struggles are really the same. We want a workplace and a society where each of us can be who we really are openly and freely." She said. The conference also featured an entire track dealing with labor and workplace issues.

Other tracks illustrated NGLTF's commitment to being more inclusive of

"Whether you advocate, educate, demonstrate, or celebrate we understand that these are all forms of action"

"The work we are doing now will go down in history as the day we changed our movement."

diversity with the queer civil rights movement, itself. In addition to workshop tracks on standard topics such "Organizing" and "AIDS/HIV and Health," participants could attend any of several workshops in the "Aging/Ageism," "Queer Feminist," "People of Color," "Transgender" or "Families" tracks. Organized protests by youth members at the 10th Creating Change in San Diego also led to the inclusion of a "Youth" track at this year's event.

"I am unwilling to associate myself with . . . queer conservatives such as HRC . . . Inclusion in a society based on oppression and repression is not inclusion."

Not all of the attendees were satisfied, however. One disabled activist disrupted plenary speeches on two occasions to point out a lack of discussion on issues of disability, and to demand that the organizers be more sensitive to the access needs of disabled patrons in the future. He specifically cited the fact that NGLTF had failed to provide conference schedules or materials in Braille.

Considering that 1998 has been an extremely eventful year in queer politics, (with the religious right's anti-gay national media campaign and the recent murder of Matthew Shepard on one hand, and the November 3rd election of the first open lesbian to Congress on the other) it was surprising how much of the dialogue at Creating Change centered around factionalism within the movement. Almost all of the 16 plenary speakers used the podium to publicly criticize the Human Rights Campaign for their endorsement of (defeated) New York Republican Senator Al D'amato in the last election. While moderate in his stand on gay rights, D'amato's voting record has been consistently anti-choice, and he has received a 100% approval rating from the Christian Coalition.

"I am unwilling to associate myself with conservative forces, whether those be Black conservatives such as Nation of Islam, or queer conservatives such as HRC." Cathy Cohen, a professor of Political Science at Yale University, told the crowd at the opening plenary. "Inclusion in a society based on oppression and repression is not an inclusion that I want."

All in all, it was a trying weekend for the Human Rights Campaign as they were constantly slammed on both their support of D'amato and their role in the controversial Millennium March, a proposed march on Washington set to occur on April 30th, 2000. Some conference goers went so far as to direct their dissatisfaction with HRC's policies toward the group's members and employees. HRC organizer and spokesperson Candace Gingrich staffed the organization's information table for most of the weekend, leading to a few wry comments that HRC had put her there "because people won't be rude to Candace Gingrich."

Nonetheless, HRC employees still complained of unfriendly treatment. One woman who spoke during a workshop and identified herself as an HRC staffer was greeted with boos, hisses and shouts of "resign!"

Although, according to march organizers, the Millennium March on Washington (MMOW) is not an HRC event, the march has met with a lot of resistance within the queer community. This is partially due to the fear that HRC and other supporting organizations are using it to try to "corporatize" or "whitewash" the movement, by shutting out people who are more politically radical or "counter culture" such as transgender activists, leather men, and groups like the Lesbian Avengers or the Radical Faeries. As one conference participant put it, "I'm afraid we'll all be standing out there on the Mall trying to show off how normal we are."

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process, a coalition of queer political activists many of whom were involved in planning previous national marches, were out in force at Pittsburgh. The Ad Hoc Committee was formed in June over concerns that the organizers of the Millennium March were employing a closed door, top-down organizing structure in which activists and organizations have to be elected to a board of directors before they have a voice in the planning process. Organizations which are currently represented on the Board include NGLTF, HRC, and the United Federation of Metropolitan Community Churches; but some groups, like the National Coalition for Diverse Sexuality, have applied for a spot and were rejected. The Committee asserts that the last three marches on Washington (in 1979, 1987, and 1993) were organized democratically and were open to representatives of all Gay, and Lesbian groups. The Committee has issued a call to MMOW's Board to open their process and all of their previous decisions (including whether to hold a march at all) to the entire community for input and debate.

Some fear that HRC [is] using [the Millenium March] to try to "corporatize" or "whitewash" the movement.

The Ad Hoc Committee had a lot of supporters at the conference. Many of the same plenary speakers who lambasted HRC, also used their time at the podium to criticize the march. Cathy Cohen called on NGLTF to withdraw from the Millennium March in her opening night speech, as did a few other speakers after her. Kerry Lobel did not go so far as to promise NGLTF would resign from MMOW, but did tell the crowd that she felt "We create a serious mistake when we create a dress code for our civil rights."

"Past marches have not been inclusive of mainstream politics. [T]his [is] about the mainstreaming of the LGBT movement.

MMOW organizers did open up the floor for some discussion during the conference. Three MMOW representatives, Ann DeGroot of Out Front Minnesota, Duane Cramer of the Names Project Foundation, and Robin Tyler, the event's executive producer, hosted a workshop which invited conference participates to learn more about the march and share their feelings about it. The sharing quickly reached a fevered pitch, as workshop participants booed and heckled both MMOW Board members and each other as proponents of both camps took the floor to speak their minds.

Most participants seemed to feel that the community could move forward on the march as long as MMOW organizers were willing to open up the planning process (a compromise that the MMOW Board shows little sign of considering). Some participants, however, raised other concerns. One woman felt that holding a march during an election year would take time and resources away from necessary campaign work. Another speaker questioned whether it was appropriate to name a national demonstration after a millennium that is based on the Christian calendar.

DeGroot, Cramer, and Tyler defended the event, and their intentions in organizing it, against the charge that they were attempting to exclude factions of the community.

Ann DeGroot told the hostile crowd "I think it is important to have a national march on Washington that is inclusive of a broad platform. I got involved to make sure that happens."

Executive Director Robin Tyler reiterated DeGroot's assurances that planners were not trying to shut out queers who weren't "normal looking enough," but defended nonetheless the idea of a march organized for and by a more "moderate" part of the LGBT community.

"Past marches have not been inclusive of faith and mainstream politics," she said. "I think this about the mainstreaming of the LGBT movement. So far marches have been produced by the left wing of our movement. And this is not."

Aside from movement infighting, which one might argue is inevitable at any large and diverse political gathering; Creating Change seemed to be a huge success. For those attendees who came to Pittsburgh from small towns and rural communities the conference afforded an opportunity to reconnect with the larger gay community and to spend a few days in an affirming and queer-friendly space; for activists it was a chance to network and organize; and for all participants there was the experience of absorbing the incredible energy of the crowd and participating in a dialogue and exchange of ideas that continues to shape the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender civil rights movement.

As Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing told the crowd that packed the grand ballroom for the Friday plenary, "This movement is generational. You will not see the end of it in your lifetime. So what? The important thing is that you are participating in it now."

Exactly.

by jessica brown

oob is beginning to publish Alix Dobkin's column, Minstrel Blood.

Lavender Jane is Born

Lately I've noticed lots of interest in the 1970's. Because of this and the release of my more recent CD, *Living With Lavender Jane*, I want to tell you how my early albums came about. So here's my sense of the world I came out into, and how I first began to have my say in Lesbian culture.

Constantly struggling to be heard over male musicians in recording, performance, composition and commercial music, women have had to fight many times as hard as men to be taken seriously in these fields. Now in the newly emerging Women's Community, there are professional musicians politically committed to furthering women's endeavors and willing to organize projects by, for and with women.

This is how I began a handbill advertising a New York City concert by the Lesbian trio, Lavender Jane. It is dated October 26th, 1974, a year after Lavender Jane Loves Women first put Lesbians on the musical map and helped clear a path for Ani, Melissa, K.D., the Indigo Girls and every other independent woman recording today.

I'm ecstatic to have had a role in returning women's voices to the charts where singers like Patti Page, Theresa Brewer, Rosemary Clooney and Georgia Gibbs had been obliterated by rock 'n roll during the mid 50's when the white guys stole everything from Rhythm & Blues but the strong, non-victim women's presence, inherent in traditional "race music", which had been supporting an entire Black culture--a recording and broadcast industry eliminated by rock 'n roll's co-optation. Sound familiar? It took a decade for the Motown and other "girl groups" to gain a brief foothold, only to be swept away once again, this time by the "British invasion" of the 60's.

Eventually, certain brilliant women like Dusty Springfield, Carly Simon and Joni Mitchell gained reluctant admittance to the boys club of pop music, but not without cost. Unrelenting male supremacy, intimidation and punishment for any sign of independence kept women in line and men in the spotlight. A few women pop stars were permitted to tiptoe around its margins, enjoying occasional spillover if they behaved themselves. Janis Ian, a bright and unpretentious young folksinger and acquaintance from the Gaslight in Greenwich Village, joined the short list of "one-hit" female artists whose songs dared to stray from the subject of men, a rare exception to prove the rule of men over dominant culture. But outside the mainstream and far beyond masculine sensibility or imagination, a new world had been born without men and with an audience of women who wanted something more. So we made ourselves a culture and a community to support it. This whole thing began late in the 1960's when Lesbianism met feminism and forged a lasting partnership that would change the world forever. It certainly changed me.

k.d. lang

For a dozen years I had made a living as a songwriter and entertainer with roots deep in protest and folk traditions, but the "second wave" of Feminism hit me like a ton of bricks, and its genuinely radical perspective inspired me to write and sing the love which, for thousands of years, barely recognized, let alone whispered, its own name. No matter what I wrote about my new Lesbian life, it was going to be original, unique, one-of-a-kind: a creative gold mine. Before long I found flutist Kay Gardner, like myself, fresh out of marriage, and Marilyn Ries, a lifelong Lesbian and engineer of the spoken word, who had in her possession keys to a four track studio. The rest is herstory.

My ethnic tradition combined with Kay's classical genius and Marilyn Ries' technical risk-taking, not to mention an enthusiastic crowd of Lesbian supporters. Our shared inexperience with recording music was equaled only by our passion for it, for women, and for adventure. *Lavender Jane Loves Women* was the remarkable result. This was the album that, within weeks of release, swept women off fences and out of closets.

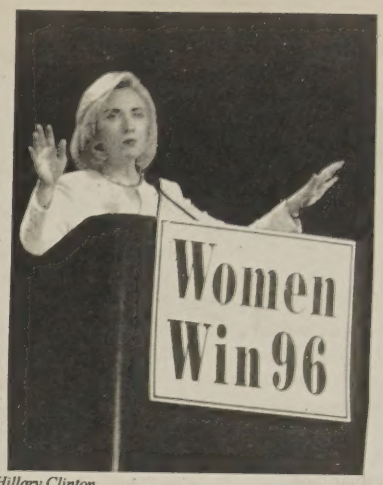
With delight and disbelief they passed the records from hand to hand, or sent them speeding across oceans and continents. Everywhere women listened, amazed, to songs which actually verbalized the previously unthinkable joy and pride of Lesbian consciousness and identity. Women huddled around stereos to confirm the outrageous evidence with their own ears, or defiantly blasted "Lesbian, Lesbian, any woman CAN be a LESBIAN" out of windows to shock conventional neighbors and unsuspecting passers-by.

And three years after *Lavender Jane*, an older and wiser, but still lively and forthright *Living With Lesbians* would chart the progress and commemorate the close of an incomparable Lesbian-feminist honeymoon period. Coast to coast, scores of elementary school teachers listened, scandalized, as children inadvertently repeated in class, the alphabet they had learned at home from its Amazon ABC's.

This is a taste of how my adventure in Lesbian music began. Resonating with the heat, innocence and devotion of those singular times, the music continues to gift us with our heritage and represents the emblem and promise of a never-to-be-repeated era. For more than any other single force in twenty centuries, Lesbian feminism carries us to the edge of human consciousness where we confront that giant evolutionary leap into the enticing, dreaded millennium.

by alix dobkin

Biology, Billy and Babies



Hillary Clinton

I realize that lots of progressive folks believe in choosing the "lesser of two evils" (candidates and legislation), but I was surprised to see *oob* defending "nurture vs. nature" arguments in response to the right-wing and mainstream gay proclamations on the causes of homosexuality. Must our complex sexual/emotional attractions be reduced to a simple-minded either/or proposition? For the mainstream-instant-gratification-quickie-stimulation it makes sense. But for radical feminists?

Despite daily heterosexual drivel, brutal propaganda and punishments, rejection and rage, women all around the world feel their hearts skip a beat and their faces heat up when that special someone of the same sex catches their eye. They may begin to notice this inexplicable turn-on from age 5 or 7 or 9. They may identify with fathers or uncles or mamas and grandmothers. They maybe tom boys or super femmes. They may live in cultures where no one ever mentioned or acknowledged the possibility of same sex unions. Still they know they have a problem, are different, etc. That can hardly be called a choice. Nor can it simply be relegated to the result of "nurture." Of course not all will continue to follow their instincts/attractions. Some will marry. Some will not. Some will lead a double life. Some will eventually come out.

But are there only one type of lesbians? Variety in human nature is as abundant as in any other nature. Some women slowly, carefully, intellectually decide to seek out women for partners and lovers. Others happen to be courted by a strong, attractive woman and simply fall unthinkingly into lesbianism. Others are turned off to men because of sexual abuse, assault, harassment and decide to seek out women for sex ... and life.

And yes, despite daily humiliation and dissatisfaction with men, women all over the world continue to seek out, be attracted to, turned on by men. Is that simply a result of "nurture"-propaganda and punishments? Or is it biology that makes these particular women more susceptible to fearful, punishing propaganda?

My personal theory is that 10 % of humans are born as heterosexuals, 10 % are born homosexuals and 80% are simply sexual with no strong, instinctive preference. Then father rule does its best to force all folks into their heterosexist system and most people acquiesce.
As a mother activist and a mama who raised 3 children, I have noticed that children are born with very different personalities *and* are highly susceptible to the father-rule rules. Although it makes for a murky, more complex discussion, I think we must admit the variety of reasons we are who we are. And "choice" seems like a real optimistic concept when we listen to the true stories of most women in this patriarchal penance.

Speaking of true stories of woman and choice, how about Hillary Clinton? Can anyone figure out why she doesn't just leave the prick? He not only cheats on her, but picks on kids, interns, etc. to exploit like an abusive, lecherous teacher or priest. He also sexually abused *at least* one of the women. Hillary has money, security and her kid is 18. Still she stays. Go figure. Let's start a telegram/email campaign to Hillary: *"Please Hillary, for the morale of American women and your own self-respect, dump the jerk. "*

Yet folks are always attacking poor moms who don't leave brutish guys, ("Why doesn't she leave?"), or do leave with nothing, ("She made such bad choices"). And, of course, poor moms have about 100 less "choices" than Hillary. Although I'm embarrassed for Hillary, I feel no pity for her. She joined Billy boy in 1996 in his attack on 5 million moms on welfare, insisting that all we really needed was a job or a man or personal responsibility or the state's right to run our lives. Those 5 million women have now been joined by the next 5 million women (welfare has a 2 year turn-over) who really just need some economic and social support for their dependent children.

The death toll here in Wisconsin since Billy's attack on the most vulnerable women (coincidentally again mostly young women in their mid-twenties) includes 6 children who died violently painful deaths because mom wasn't allowed to protect them: a disabled 13 year old scalded to death in a tub while mom was forced to "work or else" leaving him with a 14 year old sibling; a 4 month old girl suffocated by a drunken dad when mom was forced to "work or else" and couldn't extract child care out of the state's welfare system; 3 tiny babies burned to death while mom was "working or else" 8 hours a day for free for a non-profit poverty pimp; a child dead in a car while mom was "working or else" in a medical clinic and couldn't find sick child care. And these are just the ones we know about.

Billy's states' rights welfare plan allows Wisconsin to provide only $77 per child to support children of disabled moms. So we are also watching women with disabilities driven to an early grave.

For poor people it's rarely a question of "choices." Sure, we can choose between horrible and bad. But somehow I think Hillary's "choices" cover a far broader range.

pat gowens

Post-modernism Harms Women

continued from page 6

dominant male paradigm. Such would not be the case were the elimination of gender to actually benefit women. But in a society predisposed to favor white men, the elimination of sexual distinction -- like the elimination of affirmative action - only serves to reinforce the status quo, and the status quo favors white men.

The "analysis" of identity politics and progress by Kristin Severson and Victoria Stanhope which appeared in the April issue of *off our backs* promised to "unite people" on the basis of "the real issue of their ideologies not their very complex and constructed social identities." In the eyes of Severson and Stanhope, then, skin color apparently pales in comparison to "ideologies", while concrete differences in physical anatomy are nothing more than superfluous "complex and constructed social identities." With no apparent sense of irony, they offer Michael Foucault's philosophy of de-constructionism as a panacea to the oppression of women and racial minorities -as if a white man like Foucault could provide the definitive explanation of such oppression.

"Post-modernism" is nothing more than the booby-trap of relativism which teaches the gullible to imagine that they have slipped free of sexism and racism and are looking at a cage from the outside when in reality they are ensnared and gaze at the world through their prison bars. Far from offering an alternative to identity politics, "deconstructionism" is the penultimate development of identity politics -- in the circles where "post-modernism" is all the rage, "self-identification" trumps the combined evidence of anatomy, personal history and actual behavior.

The Lesbian Community Project's lip-service to the desirability of a board comprised of an equal number of whites and people of color apparently absolves it of any responsibility for actually installing such a board. That organization's solicitous inclusion of a woman who claims to be a man apparently requires the exclusion of it woman" and "women" from the bylaws. And a male who proclaims himself to be a woman despite living, working and killing like a man is accepted at his word. In each instance, saying it apparently makes it so - and the result is not only further oppression for the truly oppressed but a diminished capacity on our part to recognize oppression when and where it occurs.

In a world in which women are routinely discriminated against, abused and murdered because *they* are *women*, "deconstruction" offers the salve of collective amnesia to soothe humanity's conscience.

margaret deirdre o'hartigan

Dykes To Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel

the DRAMA of the GIFTED CHILD
©1998 BY ALISON BECHDEL
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MO AND SYDNEY DECIDE TO SPEND THE FIRST HALF OF THEIR CHRISTMAS VACATION WITH SYDNEY'S FATHER AND STEPMOTHER.
WHOA! AN MR1700D! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! THANKS, DAD!
PAUL! YOU PROMISED TO SCALE BACK THIS YEAR! THAT MUST HAVE COST FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!
SEVEN. IT'S AN AMAZING PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY! OPEN IT UP, SYD!
OPEN YOURS FIRST!
HA! YOU LITTLE MINX!
SYDNEY! YOU SPENT SEVEN HUNDRED BUCKS ON THAT? WHAT ABOUT THE BUDGET WE DREW UP FOR YOU? WHAT ABOUT YOUR DEBT?
MO, RELAX! I GOT ONE TOO, SO IT'S LIKE I BROKE EVEN!
AND THE SECOND HALF WITH MO'S FAMILY.
UH... THANKS, DAD. HOW THOUGHTFUL. BUT Y KNOW, I WORK IN A BOOKSTORE. I GET AN EMPLOYEE DISCOUNT. I TELL YOU THIS EVERY YEAR.
WELL, I GOT IT AT 20% OFF AT BUNNS AND NOODLE. BUT IF YOU DON'T WANT IT, I'LL TAKE IT BACK.
DAD! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU! HAVEN'T I EXPLAINED A THOUSAND TIMES HOW BUNNS AND NOODLE IS RAPING THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE!
NICE TALK, MO! JUST TAKE THE BOOK! YOU'VE ALWAYS GOTTA GET EVERONE'S ATTENTION.
SCOTT, WHY DON'T YOU GO POLISH YOUR JUMBO WOOD?
WHY'RE YOU SO CRITICAL OF SCOTT'S GOLF-PLAYING, MO? I THOUGHT LESBIANS LIKED GOLF.
SYDNEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I... I JUST THOUGHT I'D WORK ON THIS CROSSWORD THAT WAS LYING HERE.
SISTER IN-LAW
I FORGOT TO WARN YOU. MOM'S A TAD TERRITORIAL ABOUT THE DAILY PUZZLE.
SCOTTY! GET ME SOME MORE EGGNOG. QUICK.
THE DRIVE HOME IS A BIT TENSE...
GOD! IT WAS LIKE I'D SNAPED CAPTAIN QUEEG'S BALLS! I ONLY FILLED IN A COUPLE SQUARES! "PERSONA NON ____." WHO COULD RESIST?!
HEY, YOUR DAD'S NOT EXACTLY MR. MENTAL HEALTH EITHER. HOW OLD'S YOUR STEPMOTHER? IS SHE DRIVING YET?
MEANWHILE, THEIR CAT-SITTERS ARE MAKING AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY.
WHAT'RE YOU DOING ON SYDNEY'S COMPUTER? AND WHY ARE YOU BLUSHING?
I, UH... I WAS JUST LOOKING TO SEE IF SHE HAD ANY GAMES.
KOFF.
OH MY GOD! I'D SAY SHE DOES.

the new jersey project presents...

Spring Conference April 9, 1999 at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, NJ. Presentations will offer both a domestic and a global perspective on environmental justice issues, such as scarcity and distribution, the subjugation of women and world hunger, environmental racism, and related topics. For more information please contact the New Jersey Project office, William Paterson Universtiy, Wayne, NJ 07470. Phone: (973)720-2296. Email: nj_project@wpc.wilpaterson.edu.

radical journal

Rain and Thunder: A Radical Feminist Journal of Discussion and Activism. They publish four issues per year falling on the solstices and equinoxes at the cost of $1 per $1,000 you make in gross income. The journal will have news, reviews, direct action updates, theory, artwork, interviews, and much more. Please send subscriptions to Rain and Thunder, P.O. Box 813,Northampton, MA 01061 with you address and check enclosed.

8th annual visionary awards gala...

in Washington DC needs volunteers. The DC Rape Crisis Center needs Volunteers for the auction, logistics, restaurant, fundraising, honorees, and public relations committees. The event is June 1999. The first volunteer meeting is on January 19th, 1999 from 6:30-8:00pm. Call Genevieve at (202)232-0789 for more information.

lesBiGay Trans and allies...

are invited to the 5th year of Sober Spring Break, held the weeks between mid-February and mid-April. Students and non-Students welcome. Camp Sister Spirit is a clean and sober space free of violence in word and deed. Registration is $25-$50 depending on what you can afford, and the boarding fee is $10 per night. For more information please call (601)344-1411, or write to CSS-SB, PO Box 12, Ovett, Mississippi, 39464.

call for papers!

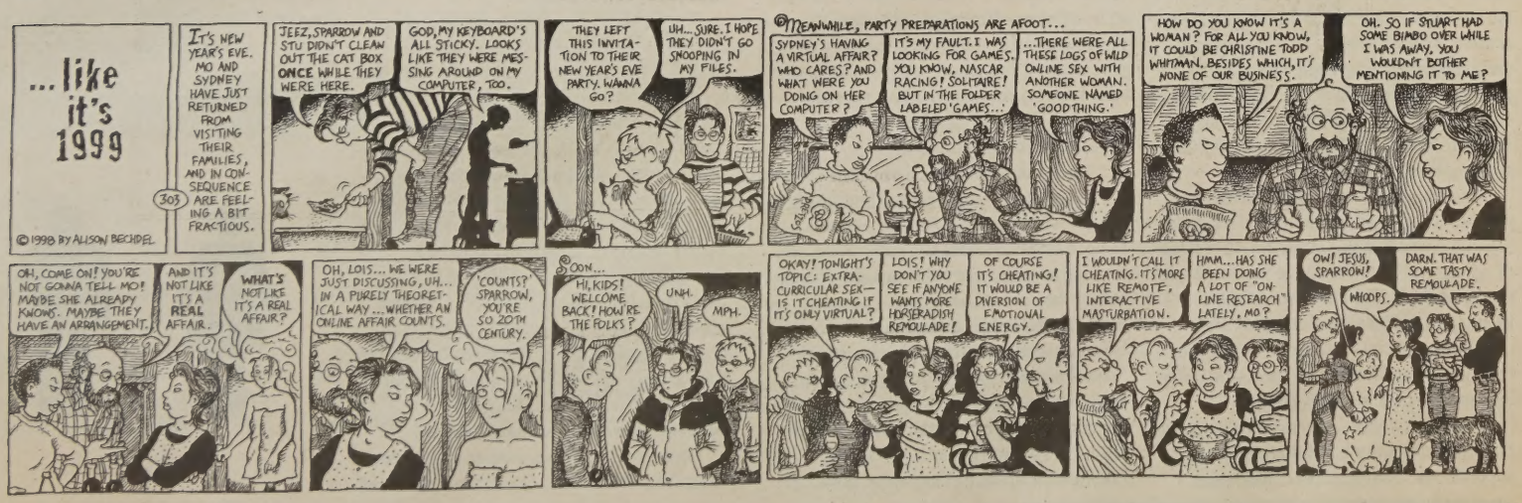
feminist ethics revisited

The Department of Philosophy and The Ethics Center of the University of South Florida will host an international conference on feminist ethics to be held on October 1-3, 1999. The conference will be devoted to an examination of the theoretical, social, and cultural advances in feminist ethics in the last two decades, as well as, a look into the future of feminist ethics. A volume is expected to be published of selected papers from the conference. Those who wish to submit papers (twenty minutes reading time) should contact Peggy DesAutels, The Ethics Center, University of South Florida, 100 Fifth Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701 or Janne Waugh, Department of Philosophy, CPR 107, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620. The deadline for submission is April 15th.

feminism and anti-racism: international struggles

the editors of this forthcoming volume seek previously-unpublished submissions from feminist anti-racist activists and feminist scholars both locally and globally. Submission (in english) should address the following questions: 1)How does gender and region/nation structure how feminists engage in anti-racist practices?; 2) How has the restructuring of the world economy affected feminist anti-racist practices?; 3) What are the actual practices of feminist anti-racist organizers? Deadline for submission of 500 word abstracts is February 15, 1999. For more information contact France Winddance Twine, Jackson School of International Studies, Box 35-3650, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195-3650 or Kathleen Blee, Director of Women Studies, Program, 2630 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260: email: kblee+@pitt.edu.

Dykes To Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel


...like it's 1999
©1998 BY ALISON BECHDEL
303
IT'S NEW YEAR'S EVE. MO AND SYDNEY HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM VISITING THEIR FAMILIES, AND IN CONSEQUENCE ARE FEELING A BIT FRACTIOUS.
JEEZ, SPARROW AND STU DIDN'T CLEAN OUT THE CAT BOX ONCE WHILE THEY WERE HERE.
GOD, MY KEYBOARD'S ALL STICKY. LOOKS LIKE THEY WERE MESSING AROUND ON MY COMPUTER, TOO.
THEY LEFT THIS INVITATION TO THEIR NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY. WANNA GO?
UH... SURE. I HOPE THEY DIDN'T GO SNOOPING IN MY FILES.
MEANWHILE, PARTY PREPARATIONS ARE AFOOT...
SYDNEY'S HAVING A VIRTUAL AFFAIR? WHO CARES? AND WHAT WERE YOU DOING ON HER COMPUTER?
IT'S MY FAULT. I WAS LOOKING FOR GAMES. YOU KNOW, NASCAR RACING! SOLITAIRE! BUT IN THE FOLDER LABELED 'GAMES'...
...THERE WERE ALL THESE LOGS OF WILD ONLINE SEX WITH ANOTHER WOMAN. SOMEONE NAMED 'GOODTHING.'
HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S A WOMAN? FOR ALL YOU KNOW, IT COULD BE CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN. BESIDES WHICH, IT'S NONE OF OUR BUSINESS.
OH. SO IF STUART HAD SOME BIMBO OVER WHILE I WAS AWAY, YOU WOULDN'T BOTHER MENTIONING IT TO ME?
OH, COME ON! YOU'RE NOT GONNA TELL MO! MAYBE SHE ALREADY KNOWS. MAYBE THEY HAVE AN ARRANGEMENT.
AND IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S A REAL AFFAIR.
WHAT'S NOT LIKE IT'S A REAL AFFAIR?
OH, LOIS... WE WERE JUST DISCUSSING, UH... IN A PURELY THEORETICAL WAY... WHETHER AN ONLINE AFFAIR COUNTS.
'COUNTS?' SPARROW, YOU'RE SO 20TH CENTURY.
SOON...
HI, KIDS! WELCOME BACK! HOW'RE THE FOLKS?
UNH.
MPH.
OKAY! TONIGHT'S TOPIC: EXTRACURRICULAR SEX— IS IT CHEATING IF IT'S ONLY VIRTUAL?
LOIS! WHY DON'T YOU SEE IF ANYONE WANTS MORE HORSERADISH REMOULADE!
OF COURSE IT'S CHEATING! IT WOULD BE A DIVERSION OF EMOTIONAL ENERGY.
I WOULDN'T CALL IT CHEATING. IT'S MORE LIKE 'REMOTE, INTERACTIVE MASTURBATION.'
HMM... HAS SHE BEEN DOING A LOT OF "ONLINE RESEARCH" LATELY, MO?
OW! JESUS, SPARROW!
WHOOPS.
DARN. THAT WAS SOME TASTY REMOULADE.

FEMINIST RADIO PROGRAMS

Albuquerque, New Mexico
KUNM 89.9
1st Saturday of the month 11:00am - 1:00 pm - *Voces Feministas* - women's voices by women of color
All other Saturdays 11:00 - 1:00 pm - *Women's Focus*

Arcata, California
KHSU 90.5
Sunday 5:30 - 6:00 pm - *Thru the Eyes of Women* - local programming of women's issues
Tuesday 7:00 - 7:30 pm - *This Way Out* - news and programming for lesbians and gay men

Berkeley, California
KPFA 94.1 Pacifica
Wednesday midnight -1:30 am - *Witching Hour*- a mixture of women's issues and music

Cape Cod, Massachusetts
WOMR 92.1
First and third Friday of every month 9:00-9:30 am - *WINGS*- women's international news gathering service
Wednesday 9:00-9:30 am - *Fifty-one Percent*- news and events pertaining to women
Wednesday 9:30-12:30 pm - *Sail Away Ladies* - women musicians

Charlottesville, Virginia
WTJU 99.1
Tuesday noon and 9:00 pm - *Voices from Our Center* - information about UVA Women's Center
Wednesday 4:00-4:30 pm - *Women in the World* - public affairs
Thursday 7:00-9:00 pm - *Eclectic Women* - women musicians

Columbia Gorge, OR
KBOO 92.7 FM
same programming as Portland (see below)

Garberville, CA
KMUD 91.1
Monday (every other) 7:00 - 8:00 pm - *Feminist Radio Network* - call-in talk show on women's issues
Tuesday 9:00 - 9:30 am - *This Way Out* - news and programming for lesbians and gay men
Wednesday 10:00 am - 12:00 pm - locally produced mixture of music and talk
Thursday 9:30 - 10:00 am - *WINGS* - women's international news gathering service

Kalamazoo, MI
WIDR 89.1 FM
Saturday 11:00 -1:00 pm - *The show formerly done by Sabrina Yacoub is under revision, we hope to publish new details soon. Tune in to see what is happening.*

Los Angeles, CA
KPFK 90.7, Pacifica
Wednesday 7:00 pm - *Feminist Magazine*

Las Vegas, NV
KUNV 91.5 FM
Sunday 12-2 pm *Women's Voices,* host Geri Blake

Madison, WI
WORT 89.9
Sunday 11:00 - 11:30 am *Her Turn* - news and information by and about women
Sunday 11:30am - 2:00 pm *Her Infinite Variety* - women's music and culture

Memphis, TN
Free Radio Memphis 94.7
Wednesday 7:00 - 9:00 *Estrogen Bomb*
Friday 6:00 - 7:00 pm *Grrls Strong*
Free Radio Memphis is a pirate radio station fighting to stay on the air

Mendocino County, Philo, Ukiah, and Fort Bragg, CA
KZYX 90.7, 88.3, KZYX 91.5
Monday 7:00 pm *Women's Voices*
Tuesday 4:00 pm *WINGS* - women's international news gathering service
Thursday 4:00 pm *This Way Out* - news and programming for lesbians and gay men

New York City, NY
WBAI 99.5, Pacifica
Tuesday 2:00 pm - *Health Action*- women's health issues
Wednesday 2:00 pm - *Broad Science*- social and political news and discussion
Friday 1:00 pm - *Health Styles*- women's health issues

Olympia, WA
KAOS 89.3
Sunday 10:15am - 1:00 pm *Sister Sound* - music and info for, by and about women
Monday 1:00 - 3:00 pm *Wimmin Do This Every Day* - women's music, feminist news, views and pieces
Thursday 3:00 - 5:00 pm *Spotlight* - Women in Blues and Jazz
Saturday 5:30 - 8:00 pm *Dances in the Revolution* - women's blues, world/world folk, social justice news and more

Portland, OR
KBOO 90.7 FM
Tuesday 9:30-10:30 pm - *Bread and Roses* - music, guest, talk
Thursday 9:00 am - *Radio Scene* - public affairs
Friday 7:30-9:30 am - talk radio

Syracuse, NY
WAER 88 FM
Thursdays 6:00 -7:00 pm - *Women's Voices*

Tampa, FL
WMNF 88.5
Saturday 10:00 am - 12:00 noon - *Public affairs program and music*
WMNF is a community station totally supported by its listeners and run primarily by volunteers. Producers: Arlene Engelhardt and Mary Blenney

Toledo, OH
WXUT 88.3
Sunday 9:00 - 11:00 pm - *In the Company of Womyn*Toledo, OH
WXUT 88.3
Sunday 9:00 - 11:00 pm - *In the Company of Womyn*

Tucson, AZ
KXCI 91.3
Sunday 7:00 - 8:30 pm - *Broad Perspectives* - news, music, interviews
Wednesday 6:30 - 7:00 pm - *Out Loud* - local gay public affairs talk
Wednesday 10:00 - Midnight - *Radio Chicana*

Washington, DC
WPFW 89.3 Pacifica
Friday 11:00 am - *In Our Voices* - Nkenge Toure
Friday 1:00-2:00 pm - *Sophie's Parlor* - women's music, poetry, events

Willimlotte Valley, OR
KBOO 100.7 - same programming as Portland (see above)

If you know of any other feminist radio shows, please let us know so we can include them in our list.

Festivals and Meetings

January 7-10, 1999
Radical-Feminist Lesbian Festival - Greenfield, MA
This festival is open to all radical feminist womyn. "If you know that mean are waging a war against women; that rape, battering, incest, pornography and prostitution are some of the main instruments of male supremacy...you're a radical feminist. Anyone who promotes or defends pornography or sadomasochism will be asked to leave. Women-born women only. Vegetarian meals with vegan options in a big cozy house. Space is limited, so register early.
CONTACT: L. Keith, PO Box 813, Northampton, MA 01061

February 5 - 7, 1999
NJ/NY/CT Bisexual Conference
Featuring workshops, and speakers, entertainment.
CONTACT: Bi Con 1999, 13 Dartmouth Avenue, Apt. 3B, Bridgewater, NJ 08807-3420
email: bi99@biconf.org
web: www.biconf.org

July 25 - 30, 1999
Women's Motorcycle Festival: An Adventure in the Catskills - Kingston, NY
"Our purpose is to bring together women motorcycle enthusiasts from all walks of life, to share a week of learning, riding and fun. Join us and experience the Catskill Mountains and the camaraderie of other women bikers. This week long event will help you become a safer rider through education and fun." Includes a buffet dinner icebreaker, workshops, bike show, guided tours and a Hudson River cruise.
CONTACT: Women for Safe Riding, PO Box 146, West Shokan, NY 12494, (914) 657-6227

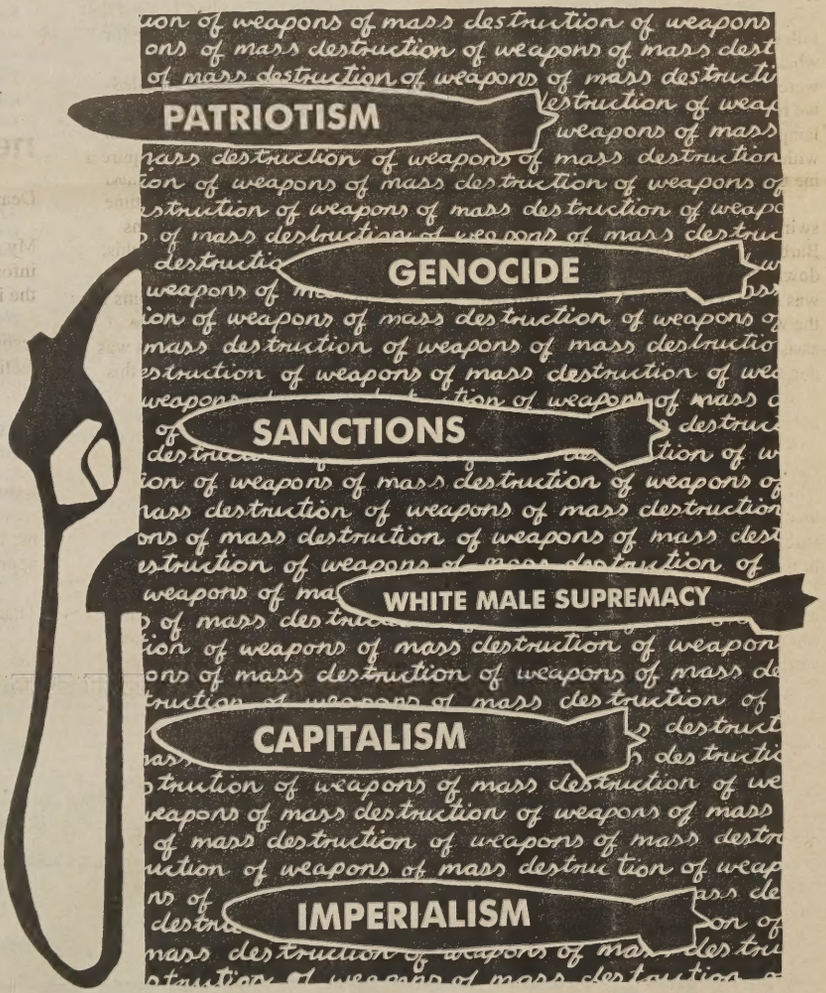
International Conferences and Meetings

January 13-15, 1999
Global Meeting Of Generations - Alexandria, VA
First ever global inter-generational dialogue on development. Leaders of the past, present and future will discuss key issues and opportunities facing humanity in the 21st Century.
CONTACT: Kathy Morrell & Associates, Inc. PO Box 11276
Alexandria, VA 22312, USA
fax:(703) 941-4229
e-mail: kmaplan@erols.com

A rousing and heartfelt thank you to all those supporters and friends who have contributed so generously to our appeal for donations. Your contributions have really made a difference. The collective has been touched by all the support and the words of encouragement sent. You have our sincere and deeply felt gratitude.

Happy New Year and wherever you are, keep fighting patriarchy!

—the *off our backs* collective



TREASON '98

no comfort at the Comfort Inn

Dear *oob*,

From June 24 through June 27, 1998, myself, my partner (Barb) and a friend stayed at the Comfort Inn on East 59th Street in Anderson, Indiana. I made this reservation several weeks in advance by telephone, and the room was paid for in advance by credit card. At the time I called, I asked if they had a handicap-accessible room on the first floor. The representative said, "Yes," and "We have a swimming pool, too." I asked if the pool was also accessible; the representative responded, "Yes."

When we arrived, there was not a handicap parking space in the rear of the building (which, we were told, was the closest entrance to our room), nor was there a ramp or a cut in the sidewalk. The lot was very small, with room for only eight to ten cars to park.

Our room, number 128, was *not* accessible. Barb pushed my scooter into the room, because the metal strip holding down the carpet was too high for me to cross. The bathroom was *very* small and even the able-bodied members of the party had difficulty fitting in the room. The bathroom door barely cleared the toilet. There were no handrails whatsoever. There were table lamps that were easy-access. The next day, when we returned from being away, the table lamps were gone, having been replaced with wall lamps, which were difficult for me to reach without stretching.

The supposedly "accessible" swimming pool was a nightmare. When Barb and I got to the pool, I was going down the ladder, only to find out that it was loose. I lost my balance and fell into the water. Fortunately, Barb was there to assist me. I could not get out of the pool due to the pain in my legs. We had the maintenance man, Danny, help me get out. We tried a stepladder, but it wouldn't work. I had to climb on top of a small patio table, with Barb and Danny holding onto me. I was scared and upset. We went back to the room. My legs were sore and I ended up with a softball-sized bruise on my left calf.

At one point, a motel employee approached us and asked to enter the room. She had a cast on her leg and carried a clipboard. Thinking she was with Housekeeping, we consented to her entering the room. She checked the television, lamps, and other furnishings, made some notes on her clipboard and left. At no time did she identify herself by name or job title or give us any indication as to why she was in the room. We have yet to discover who she was or what she was doing. (I was told the woman was, indeed, with housekeeping, but still no explanation was provided as to what she was doing in our room.)

We (Barb and myself) were locked out of the room three times because the plastic computer key-card did not work properly. Our friend Jan, was locked out four times. The first time I waited by myself for at least 10-15 minutes before the door was unlocked from the inside. Later, when we were locked out again, late at night, Barb walked around to the front lobby to get another key. She was given one with no explanation of the problem, no offer to have it corrected, and no apology for the inconvenience from any Comfort Inn employee.

We have called and written to Gary Thoraldson, CEO of Comfort Inn, and we have called their franchise offices numerous times. One customer service representative, Kathleen, who, after heaving an audible sigh of annoyance, told us that "a refund isn't going to happen, you had a choice, you could have gone to another motel." Hardly an attitude to contribute to return business or satisfied customers!

Finally, after numerous calls and letters, on July 28, I received a letter from Comfort Inn (dated July 20) that was equally unhelpful and unsympathetic. In it, Comfort Inn claimed that I was told when I called that only one-bed rooms were available for handicapped persons (apparently Comfort Inn assumes that all disabled people are friendless and travel alone, and they do not take into consideration that a disabled person may well require a traveling companion.) They also claim that I was told on the phone at the time of the reservation that the bathrooms were not accessible. I was not told this, and where is the logic of having handicapped-accessible motels rooms if, once you're inside, you can't use the bathroom? The entire pool incident was not addressed in the letter at all. In this letter, the representative claimed that she showed me the room and I approved it. This is blatantly untrue, as I made the reservation over the phone and did not see the room until we arrived for the stay. Also, I had never met the woman who called, so how could she have shown me the room? We had also been charged for one more night than we stayed, and our AAA discount was not included. While the extra charge was finally corrected, after several attempts, I have since been notified by AAA that I will not be getting any credit or refund from the discount.

We are outraged with the lies and disrespect that was given to each of us. Comfort Inn advertises "100% Satisfaction Guaranteed." Obviously, they have no knowledge of how to serve people with disabilities, and no idea of even the most basic service for customers. This goes beyond bad service, however. We were discriminated against and treated as less than human. The one accessible feature of the room, the reachable lamps, was removed during our stay, as if to ensure we had no conveniences whatsoever.

I have contacted the ADA (Americans With Disabilities Act agency) for further information and suggestions as to how to pursue this further. Comfort Inn appears to have no intention of even trying to come up with a sincere apology, much less any effort toward correcting either its facilities to make them accessible, or its advertising, to stop giving the impression that they have accessible facilities.

Before you decide to travel, make sure you receive your motel reservation in writing (with accessibilities listed), and follow through with any questions you may have. You may wish to stay somewhere other than Comfort Inn or its affiliates, Choice Hotels International, Sleep Inn, Quality Inns, Clarion Inns, Hotels and Resorts, and Mainstay Suites.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Hatzinikolis
Columbus, OH

newly lesbian

Dear *oob*,

My name is Lisa and I am looking for information that will help me understand the issues I am about to face.

I have just recently had my first lesbian sexual experience. This is a feeling I have wanted to act on for almost 15 years. I'm 36 years old and a mother of three. I'm currently married, but I've known since the day I said, "I do" that it was a mistake. I have been living the life that was expected of me.

So, if you can help me by sending me information, it would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

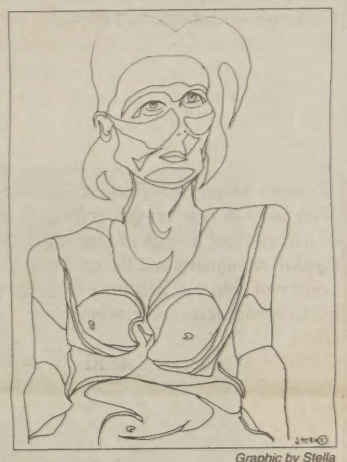
Lisa J. Watson
Danbury, CT

Pauline Bart—a shero

Dear *oob*,

Thank you for the interview with Pauline Bart! She's been one of my sheroes for such a long time. Her work on stopping rape is what inspired all my research on assault and harassment.

Marty Langelan
Washington, DC



Graphic by Stella

oob—a positive influence

Dear *oob*,

I'm a 15-year old high school student and one of the few feminist in my area. *Oob* provides me with news and articles about things I really care about. It provides a link to other feminists and I don't feel so alone. I don't make a lot of money, but I feel that this $20 should help keep *oob* around. If it wasn't for your newsletter, I don't know what to do. Thanx for being such a positive influence in my life.
Sincerely,

Reanne Theresa O'Sullivan
Forest Grove, OR

Dear *oob*,

I hope you can keep going. You're the only feminist mag I get. You do consistently excellent work!

Moni Usasz
Lincoln, NE

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They all have a tasteless, odorless, colorless substance in them that could set you up for rape. *And your drink could too.*

Rape is a sad reality. And it can happen to anyone. *Even you.*

When secretly slipped into a beverage, even a glass of lemonade, sedating substances can leave *anyone* vulnerable to sexual assault. You may not be able to see it, smell it, or taste it. And you don't have to be at a bar or club. It could happen in any social setting. The tragic fact is that the reasons for rape really have nothing to do with you. It happens *only* because there are people who wish to harm.

But there are some things that may help reduce your risk:

- Always keep your beverage in sight.
- At a bar or club, accept drinks only from the bartender or server.
- At social gatherings, don't accept open-container drinks from anyone.
- If you experience dizziness, extreme drowsiness, or other sudden and unexplained symptoms, call someone you trust. Go to a hospital emergency room immediately. Try to retain a sample of the beverage for testing.

If you think you've been sexually assaulted, call (800)656-HOPE for a rape crisis center near you, or call the police immediately. Don't be afraid to reach out for help. There are tests to help prove you've been drugged, and a federal law that can put the rapist in prison for 20 years.

So please, help reduce your risk...

Watch your drink!

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